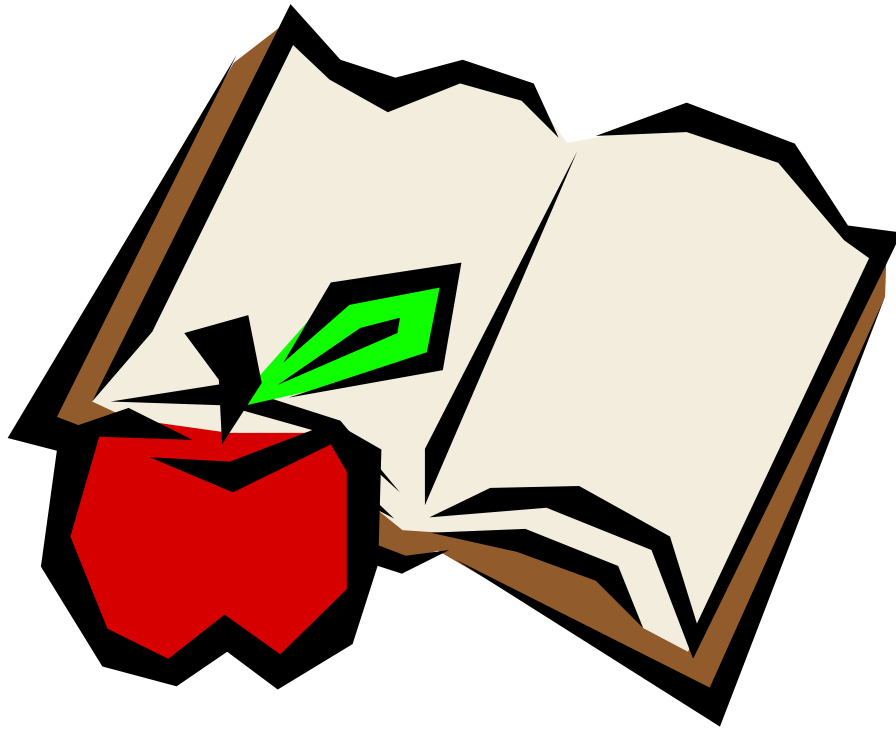# NEEDS ASSESSMENT

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW

Most if not all planning models have needs assessment as the initial phase of planning to provide the foundation for the development of an action or work plan and budget. This is also true in Kentucky's *Consolidated Plan and Funding Application.* In the Kentucky consolidated planning model, the needs assessment process is part of a continuous improvement system. Once a school or district has developed a plan, the annual needs assessment always includes a review of the effectiveness of the current plan, as well as a review of any new or updated data since the last review of needs. The needs assessment process also supports a regular refocusing or recommitment to the school's or district's vision for children.

For Kentucky consolidated planning efforts, students and their needs are the focus. The following are relevant state requirements:

- School councils are required by law to annually review the school's performance on the state school accountability system, review this data disaggregated for specific groups of students, and use this information in adopting a school plan (i.e., the consolidated plan*)* which is designed to ensure that each student makes progress toward meeting the state learning goals (KRS 160.345(2)j).

- The Kentucky school accountability system includes public reporting, with school and district level "report cards" that include data disaggregated for specific groups of students (KRS 158.6453(7).

- Schools which are not making sufficient progress on results for students are required to engage in school improvement planning after receiving a scholastic audit or review using the *Kentucky Standards and Indicators for School Improvement* (703 KAR 5:120; KRS 158.6455(4)(a)2).

Consequently, in the needs assessment for the consolidated plan, local school and district teams will use, at a minimum, information from the

- Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS);
- *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement;*
- Supporting data or evidence referenced in the Descriptors for the *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement* (e.g., other achievement data, ACT, student work, etc.);
- School or District Report Card; and
- Other relevant sources of information.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT CONTENT

The consolidated plan needs assessment has two components:

- Use of the *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement*, and

- Review of data from the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS).

STANDARDS AND INDICATORS AS FRAMEWORK

The *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement* serve as the framework for the needs assessment for the consolidated plan. Information about the *Standards and Indicators* can be found on the Department's home page at *http://www.kde.state.ky.us/olsi/improve/schaudit/schaudit.asp*

The nine standards for school improvement are organized into the three broad areas defined in the law on scholastic audits (KRS 158.6455):

> academic performance,
> learning environments, and
> efficiency.

Each standard has specific indicators, making a total of eighty-eight indicators. Fifty-eight of those indicators reflect a shared responsibility with the district. The *Standards and Indicators* are integrally related as a holistic view, not isolated activities. Randomly picking and choosing indicators for review may result in an inaccurate picture or in failing to meet grant needs assessment requirements.   For example, KRS 158.6455 also requires attention in the scholastic audit to the quality of the school council's data analysis and planning. Comprehensive planning is addressed particularly in Standard 9, but indicators throughout all nine standards also address uses of data.

The tool that has been developed by the Kentucky Department of Education for conducting a scholastic audit, review or self-study is the *Performance Descriptors for Kentucky's Standards and Indicators for School Improvement*. It may be found at the above website. The tool relies on multiple data sources, identified for each indicator.   Local teams are encouraged to add any other sources of information they deem relevant. For convenience, there are actually two *Descriptors* tools:

> School level, for assessing school accountability
> District level, for assessing district accountability for school improvement (new Fall 2001)

The school level *Descriptors* tool reflects that schools:
- are the original sources of all or most data since they directly serve students;
- are responsible for targeting and providing instruction; and
- identify the priority needs at the school level.

The district level *Descriptors* tool reflects that the district:
- supports schools in collecting relevant data;
- compiles information and summarizes findings from all the schools for district level planning;
- coordinates and provides leadership and resources across schools;
- reviews and supports the needs identified by the schools; and
- identifies the priority needs at the district level.

The district level needs assessment process integrates key findings and priority needs identified across the schools as well as from district-wide needs. The district focuses its efforts on identifying:

- common needs across schools;
- needs which affect district-level planning (e.g., changing demographics, assignment of students to buildings, contracting);
- needs that are present but which by their nature may not be identified by individual schools (e.g., equity across schools);
- needs identified to meet equity and program assurances requirements; and
- needs for leadership to support school and district goals.

STANDARDS AND INDICATORS **TOOLS**

The consolidated plan needs assessment requires the use of the *Standards and Indicators* to identify areas of improvement needed. To conduct the needs assessment, schools have two options, both based on the *Standards and Indicators.*

First, the school may conduct a self-study using the *Descriptors* tool. If a school has already experienced a scholastic audit or review, then the school has already prepared a School Profile and has a report from the audit or review that can be used as the framework for the needs assessment. (As part of the audit/review process, schools are provided recommendations on next steps, which often include further study and work in areas of particular need.)

> Training on using the tool is available from trained state and local staff. Contact the Division of School Improvement at ***http://www.kde.state.ky.us/olsi/improve/schaudit/schaudit.asp*** or the regional service center ***http://www.kde.state.ky.us/oapd/rsc/default.asp*** for resources.

A second approved alternative format for schools is to use the *2001 KASC Consolidated Planning Kit*, a series of school study booklets that have been aligned to and address all *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement,* except those indicators involving staff evaluation, which is beyond the scope of school council authority.

> Information on purchase and training is available from the Kentucky Association of School Councils by email at ***kasc@kasc.net*** or web at ***http://www.kasc.net.***

Districts should use the district level *Descriptors* tool for their self-study. This tool is newly available in pilot form Fall 2001at the scholastic audit website above. Since it is an expanded set of descriptions for fifty-eight indicators that are already included in the school level tool, additional training beyond the *Standards and Indicators* training is not required at this time.

If a school or district finds that more extensive information is needed about a particular topic, there are several tools available to assist, such as:

> Technology Impact Review Tool at ***http://www.kde.state.ky.us/oet/customer/evaluation.asp***
> Equity at ***http://www.kde.state.ky.us/olsi/improve/schaudit/schaudit.asp***

COMMONWEALTH ACCOUNTABILITY TESTING SYSTEM (CATS)

A critical and ongoing step in the needs assessment is to have a clear picture of how the school is performing in relation to public expectations for student learning, attendance, and

success (persistence to graduation/drop-out, progress in school/retention, and transition to adult life). School councils are required to review this data and use it in developing the school's plan.

With the implementation of the long-term accountability system in Fall 2001, there are individual school reports of these measures produced by the Kentucky Department of Education:
- Long-Term Accountability Growth Chart (August 1 public release)
- Kentucky Performance Report (October 2 public release)
- Kentucky Core Content Report (October 2 public release)
- Student Listing and Student Item Level Report (contain individual student information; no public release)

These reports, which include the Kentucky Core Content Test/KCCT, the non-academic data and the norm-referenced test data (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills/CTBS), are made available to the individual schools with specific information and assistance in interpretation through the Office of Assessment and Accountability and the network of district assessment coordinators. Information can be found on the Department's web page at *http://www.kde.state.ky.us/comm/commrel/cats/*.

Minimum questions from these reports that schools should consider include at least the following:

1. How does the school Accountability Index for this year:
   a. Compare to 1999 and 2000?
   b. Compare to the school goals for this cycle in academic areas, attendance, drop-out, retention and/or adult transition?
   c. Compare to district and state averages? What are the implications?

2. Look at the school's Long Term Accountability Chart. For odd-numbered years, how much improvement is needed in the school's Accountability Index in the coming year, to reach its two-year goal? For even-numbered years, how much improvement is needed in the next two years to meet its next two-year goal?

3. How does the school's overall Academic Index and score for each content area:
   a. Compare to 1999 and 2000?
   b. Compare to the school's own content area targets for this cycle?
   c. Compare to district and state averages? What are the implications?

4. Look at the school's Long Term Accountability Chart. How much improvement is needed in each content area to reach the school's next two-year goal?

5. If the school improves at the rate it improved since last year, how many years would it take to reach the state goal of 100 out of a possible index of 140:
   a. On the school's Accountability Index?
   b. On the school's own Academic and content area targets?

6. For this year's data, in each content area:

a. What changes has the school made in the percent of students at each performance level (Novice, Apprentice, Proficient, Distinguished/NAPD) compared to 1999-2000? To the past year?
b. What is the performance of special populations (e.g., ethnic and gender groups, special needs students, Limited English Proficiency, free and reduced lunch status)? What has the school done to increase the number of proficient and distinguished students in these populations?
c. Has any achievement gap narrowed or widened since last year?

7. How do other data relative to school goals (e.g., ACT, classroom grades, criterion-referenced assessments of reading skills, etc.) extend the analysis of the state assessment data to identify root causes for current student performance?

NEW TOOLS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ON STUDENT DATA FOR FALL 2001

A critical feature of the review of the state assessment data is for teachers and other staff to have a clear understanding of what those scores mean in relation to student performance. What does "proficient" level work look like in each content area at the assessed grades? How does this understanding lead to improved instruction and strategies for measuring student's continuous progress in reaching a proficient level of work?

In Fall 2001, the Kentucky Department of Education is giving every school the opportunity to send a teacher/representative(s) to team training on proficient work at the assessed grades. This is the first part of a job-embedded professional development model with student work samples for long-term local work in this area. Part of the training involves beginning a plan to work on student work and proficiency with teacher teams at the school. This "action plan" is designed to become a part of the professional development strategies in the school's/district's consolidated plan.

> Information about these workshops is available through the Department's regional service centers (RSC's). You may contact a regional service center through the Department's web at ***http://www.kde.state.ky.us/oapd/rsc/default.asp***.

In addition, the Kentucky Association of School Councils has updated a 2001 edition of the *KASC Assessment Study Sheets*. In the fall of 2000, all Kentucky schools received a special KDE edition of the *KASC Assessment Study Sheets*. These study sheets continue to be useful for most of the required data analysis. However, users should be aware that, starting in 2001, CTBS results now count as 5% of each school's overall Accountability Index. As a result, CTBS results should be an integral part of the school's review of data. These results are included in the school's Kentucky Performance Report and in the KASC Assessment Graphs mentioned in the study sheets. KASC's 2001 edition of the sheets includes updated formulas and specific instructions on where CTBS data is located.

PROCESS AND TIMELINES

SCHOOL TEAM MEMBERSHIP

The *Standards and Indicators* reflect the importance of collaboratively involving all stakeholders in the planning process. To meet state and federal grant requirements, the school needs assessment committee or team must include a well-represented group including at least the following:

- teachers (instructional staff members including a technology representative)
- school administrators,
- parents/family members,
- community members,
- employers,
- pupil support personnel, and
- students (secondary level; not required for elementary).

Schools are encouraged to include general and special teachers, as well as staff from feeder schools and programs, including technical schools, in order to have wide input and a more integrated plan. Other recommended team members include a school council representative and the Family Resource and Youth Services Centers coordinator, if not included above, as well as someone from the district-level team to serve as a liaison with the school team to provide assistance and facilitate ongoing communication. An additional support is for input and linkages with district level coordinators for all of the programs applicable to a particular school.

The group must include reasonable representation of the ethnic diversity of the school's student body. Persons from any of the role groups may provide that representation, but KRS 156.500 makes reasonable minority representation required for all groups that advise or decide on educational issues.

SCHOOL TEAM PROCESS

The school may choose to assign small groups to collect and analyze specific standards or areas (e.g., curriculum) or to review particular sources of student and school data. For example, a small, well-represented group may focus on the Kentucky Core Content Test analysis, whereas another group or groups may focus on effective uses and deployment of technology resources. If the school team has divided into work groups, each group completes their assignment looking for root causes and then summarizes key findings and identifies priority needs from their perspective. Then representatives from each of the groups come together to present their findings to the full school needs assessment team and school council, allowing others to provide feedback. The results are then integrated for the school as a whole. However the school assigns tasks, it is important that all groups recognize that final decisions (priorities, goals, etc.) are made by the school council, not by individuals.

DISTRICT TEAM AND PROCESS

The district level team is comprised of members similar to those of the school team. To meet state and federal grant requirements, the district needs assessment team must include representation and diversity, like the school level team :

- teachers,
- administrators,
- parents,
- community members,
- employers,
- pupil support personnel, and
- students.

Other suggested district-level members include a representative of the local school board and liaisons with school planning teams. It is critical that district level coordinators from all programs covered in the plan be included on the needs assessment and planning team(s). This role is needed to assure that program requirements are met as the priorities are established and the plan is developed.

The district team follows a process similar to that of the schools. The difference is that the district team integrates the schools' needs assessments into findings and priorities at the district level and uses the district level descriptions for the *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement*, focusing particularly on the fifty-eight (58) indicators relating to the district's role in supporting teaching, learning and school improvement.

An important additional feature of the district level team is its responsibility to coordinate ongoing communication between school needs assessment teams and the central office, and between and among the schools. District members should be assigned to, and available as technical assistance to, the school teams throughout the schools' needs assessment process. Information about school needs should be informally flowing between school and central office throughout the process. While most district needs cannot be finalized until the school needs have been identified, the district is in close communication with the school teams to help schools collect relevant data, to compile data across schools, and to look at emerging root causes, findings and priorities.

SUGGESTED TIMELINES

The needs assessment process is ongoing but peaks each fall. Both school and district teams begin their work as soon as feasible after summer break. Each year in fall, the schools and district check for new or updated information, including the annual CATS results and recommendations from the *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement*. Needs assessment and the development of the action plan are both part of one planning process. To meet school and district budgeting expectations, the school level needs assessment and determination of major areas of focus should be completed by December, with district level by January. (See Section 4: Action Planning)

No later than about March 1, basic planning activities should be complete at both the school and district levels so that budgets can be finalized for staffing and allocation decisions for the next school year. These consolidated planning timelines parallel requirements regarding setting school and district priorities related to school council and district budget allocations and planning processes.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

CONSOLIDATED PLAN AND FUNDING APPLICATION

In the Executive Summary section of the *Consolidated Plan and Funding Application*, the school and district will provide a summary of the needs assessment process used to identify significant contributing factors or causes. The priority needs and significant factors identified through the needs assessment process will be included in the appropriate component(s) of the Action Plan as "Priority Needs" and "Causes/Contributing Factors".

To meet grant requirements, the *Consolidated Plan and Funding Application* must include in the Executive Summary for the school or district:

- a list of who was involved in the school or district needs assessment process (names, titles/roles); and
- a brief description of the school or district process used.

By completing the needs assessment and signing the Assurance that this process has been followed at the school and district levels, grant requirements related to needs assessment will be met for all state and federal programs covered in the consolidated plan.

LOCAL DOCUMENTATION

The needs assessment data and analysis are required but intended to be kept at the local level by the school and district, other than the priority needs and significant factors noted in the action component(s). No separate written report or analysis is required to be submitted. However, the school and district must keep local documentation regarding the needs assessment data, both to verify that grant requirements have been met and to support their ongoing planning. This documentation includes a copy of relevant data used and should already be on file (e.g., self-assessment on the *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement* or a scholastic audit report, CATS reports, data used in the School or District Report Card, reports, surveys, other evidence).

The school keeps and uses the data at the school building and makes it available to the district as needed to support the school's action plan. The district keeps the district-level information on file at the central office to support the consolidated plan for the district and to document the district's assurance that grant requirements have been met by the schools and district.

OPTIONAL CONSOLIDATED PLAN CONTENT

While the *Consolidated Plan and Funding Application* does not need to include an analysis from the needs assessment, a summary or outline of such information may be helpful locally for communicating among staff and with parents and outside groups. This optional consolidated plan content may be part of a School Profile prepared for a scholastic audit or may include such things as:

- answers to questions frequently asked concerning:
  - student enrollment,
  - demographics about the student population ((socio-economic status, etc.), and
  - administrative or organizational structure(s).

- any data that the local planning team believes to be most relevant to the priority needs.

QUALITY PLANNING PROCESS

A quality needs assessment process is described in the *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement,* Standard 9: Comprehensive and Effective Planning:

9.1.a There is evidence that a collaborative process was used to develop this vision, belief statements, mission and goals that engaged the school community as a community of learners;

9.2.a There is evidence the school/district planning process involves collecting, managing and analyzing data;

9.2.b The school/district uses data for school improvement planning;

9.3.b The school/district analyzes their students' unique learning needs;

9.4.a Perceived strengths and limitations of the school/district instructional and organizational effectiveness are identified using the collected data.

By bringing together all programs in one coordinated review of conditions and one process for identifying priority needs, a quality needs assessment process will provide the analysis needed to focus an array of resources on specific instructional goals.